THE ORIGINS OF SALÉ AND RABAT

SALÉ

The kingdom of the Barghwāṭa tribe stretched south from the Bou-Regreg River *to the Umm ar-Rabi*ᶜ*a* in the province of Tamāsnā. In the 7th century, this indigenous tribe from the Masmuda Amazigh confederation may have begun to build on the north bank of the river. They openly professed the heretical *Kharijite* doctrine and were ostracized because of their belief. The expansion of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba brought new neighbors; many Amazighs of the Zenata confederation fled from this expansion. Salé became the northernmost frontier of the Amazigh-held lands. That the earliest history is confused is understandable as writers used *Salé*, *Old Salé* and *New Salé* without clearly identifying what they were writing about. Some place *Old Salé* on the north bank, others on the south bank; still others describe it as being west of the river. Right and left banks is often found but there is no consistency in exactly what right and left means in the context of a river bank – to some it describes where the banks are when facing downriver while others maintain that facing upriver is the correct way to name them – but most don't bother and leave it up to the reader to figure it out. But it is not only the ancient writers who are to blame. Today's writers, without fail, upon encountering any mention of a fortress or *ribat*, jump to the conclusion that it must refer to the formidable Kasbah des Oudaïa in Rabat. They are naïve on the topic; otherwise they would know that *Salé* also had a *ribat* very early. The *Kingdom of Salé* is said to have existed in the 10th century.[1]

But this was hardly the beginning. The place has been inhabited for tens of thousands of years with the oldest fossil of a human being pre-Neanderthal. The Phoenician town of Koudis was located here as was a later one founded by the Carthaginians. These were followed by the ancient Roman town of Sala or Chellah on the south side of the river.

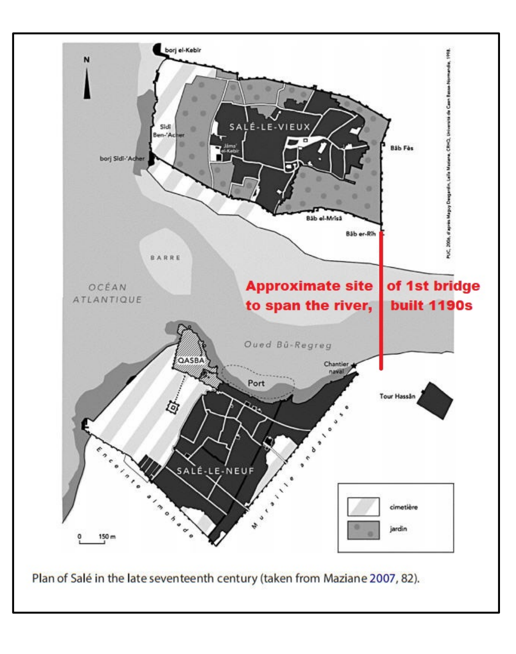
The Arab territory was dominated IDRISID dynasty, considered to be the first dynasty of Morocco, who founded their capital of Fez in 789. The population of Salé was wholly Amazigh and they practiced a religion that was an amalgamation of Islam, Judaism and local Amazigh beliefs. It also served as the capital of the Banū Ifran, one of the Zenata Amazigh tribes, in the latter half of the 10th century and was still regarded as such in 1040; they were conquered by the Almoravids around 1066. The town was being called Salé by 1030; no consensus of opinion on the origin of this name has been reached. Some relate it to the Roman town of Sala while others champion an Amazigh origin. What we would call a city has its foundations with Achara, the caïd of the Beni Oummia who was in the service of the Emir of Cordoba Ichan el Mouï – known as el-Amani. Achara had been sent by the sultan to Andalusia and with the successful conclusion of his duties there, he had obtained as a reward for his exploits the right to establish a city on the coast. He arrived at the mouth of the Bou Regreg *with three children, his wives, his servants, some wealth*, and with the help of some of the tribesmen from the Banū Ifran, he built a mosque with an adjacent palace. Around this housing started to be built which soon became identifiable as three distinct neighborhoods surrounded by a wall which constituted the first city.[2] The building of the ramparts that encircled the town and a large open area on the ocean side was started by 1050. The *al-Jāmi*ᶜ *al-A*ᶜ*ẓam* or Great Mosque was built on the site of an earlier one built by the Banū-ᶜAshara that had been razed after it fell into disrepair and was too small to accommodate the growing town. A new mosque on the same site was completed before the start of the 12th century. Designed by the Granadian architect al-Gharnāṭi, it was built with the labor

of 700 Christian slaves and Andalusian Muslums. By this time the city consisted of three quarters: *ᶜAshara*, now called *aṭ-Ṭalᶜa*, near the Grand Mosque; *al-Balīda*, the small city; and *Zanāta*, located *below the heights of the quarter of the Grand Mosque*. The first set of city walls enclosed these 3 quarters. Water for ablutions was brought to the mosque from several miles east of the city by *al-Aqwās*, a monumental aqueduct, remnants of which still stand. The city has been destroyed by earthquakes on six occasions, the last being the 1755 Lisbon earthquake which brought destruction both in the form of the quake and the destructive force of the resultant tidal wave.

The city has always had a strong Jewish presence with the current Jewish Quarter replacing the *Dār aṣ-Ṣi-nāᶜa*, the Arsenal built with access to the river via two canals through *Bāb l-Mrīsa*, and *Bāb Firan* two huge gates at the southwest corner of the walled medina. The old Jewish Quarter was located near *Bāb Ḥusayn* and covered the *al-Millāḥ al-Qadīm* quarter. Outside of the *Bāb al-Khabbāz* there is or was a shrine of the Muslim saint *Sīdī Bū-Hajja* that was visited by the Jews who held *Qāḍī Ḥājja* as a revered figure in their religion. It is worthwhile to note that sizeable populations of Jews that were expelled from Iberia relocated to Salé and Amsterdam, no doubt facilitating the link between the two places.

On the south bank of the river was a rocky elevation that was an excellent site for a fortification and a small one, called a *ribat*, was built there. Another Amazigh tribe, the Almoravid's, from the Gazzula and Lamta Amazigh tribes of the Sanhaja of Western Sahara, grew in power, founded Marrakesh in 1062 as their capital and supplanted the Barghawata-Zenata as leaders. They continued to expand; eventually overthrowing the IDRISID'S and crossing the Straits of Gibraltar to rule al-Andalus, Islamic Spain in 1085. By 1000 the *ribat* was no longer sufficient to protect Salé and control river traffic so the Almoravid's built a much larger fortification, called a Kasbah, on the site. *It was home to a brotherhood of Muslim monks, whose mission was to unite all Muslim territories.*[3]

The next Amazigh tribe to rise was the Almohad's from the Masmuda confederation. They toppled the Almoravid's in the early 12th century and used Marrakesh as their capital. Under both groups Salé flourished as the second capital and summer residence of the sultans. The Almohad Abd el-Moumen seized it in 1132 and tore down the walls. His son Youcef imported the agricultural techniques used by the inland tribes of the Bougie and Kabylie. They destroyed the Almoravid kasbah on the south bank of the river in 1144 and, under ABD AL MUMIN, built the Kasbah des Oudaïa in 1150. This larger Kasbah served two additional purposes – protection of the Atlantic coast and as a base for launching attacks on Iberia. He also built a palace as well as starting on a huge mosque, of which the Hassan Tower remains, reservoirs and houses for followers. His grandson ABU YUSUF YAQUB AL-MANSUR came to power in 1184 and envisioned Rabat as a grand new capital city enclosed by a wall which had two sides broken by four gates. Completed in 1197, the enclosed area was about twice the size of Salé. A grid of streets, residential quarters, a covered market, public baths, hotels, workshops and fountains were built along with a

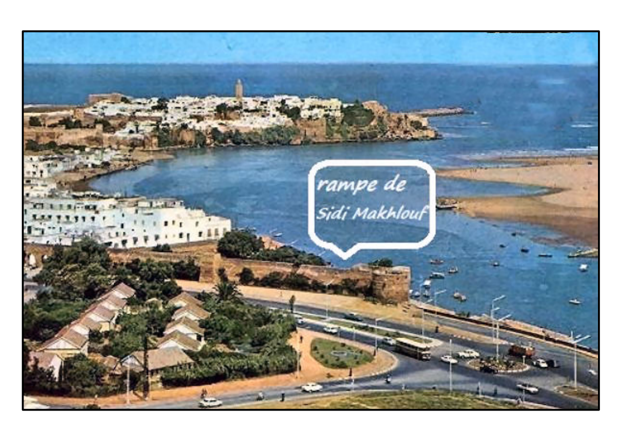


Plan of Salé in the late seventeenth century (taken from Maziane 2007, 82).

new gateway to the medina. Across the river in Salé he had a mosque built in the Talaa district, organized an arsenal on the site of the current Mellah and he linked the two cities by a great stone and wood bridge some 10 meters wide which connected the Bab er Rih in the Mellah of Salé to the ramp of Sidi Maikhlouf in Rabat.[4] In 1919 a bridge between the two banks was completed with the statement that*, by avoiding the annoying and costly transshipment from Rabat to Sale, which will certainly provide a stimulus to the commercial and industrial activity of these two cities,* as if it was the first such bridge![5] Yacoub el Mançour employed a considerable number of captives brought back from Spain, promising them freedom as soon as this work was completed and this formed the earliest Andalusian nucleus of Salé. Opposition from the largest Arab tribe in the area, the Beni Merin, blocked completion of the great building projects of el Mançour, leaving the ramparts unfinished on the side of Rabat. When he died in 1199 all construction stopped and the grand designs began to crumble. The area around the palace became the site of New Salé while some residences sprung up immediately adjacent to the Kasbah that were called Rabat, believed to be a corruption of *ribat*. The military aspect of the Kasbah and its environs made it a second center of power while New Salé grew into a third center of power. Mohammed en Nacer continued the construction of the unfinished ramparts in Rabat. Both of these grew in importance under the Zenata Amazigh MARINID dynasty of the 13th to 15th centuries with their capital at Fez. Major parts of New Salé were destroyed in the fighting between the ALMOHADS and MARINIDS. Eventually the whole area south of the Bou-Regreb adopted the name Rabat.

In 1260 Salé was captured by a Castilian naval attack and it was two weeks before ABU YUSUF YAQUB IBN ABD AL-HAQQ liberated the town. In response, he completed the walls fcing Rabat and ordered the building of the Borj ad Dumû, a fortification at the northern corner of town by the end of 1260; the Borj was the residence of the Ca'id. In place of the arsenal, he installed the Dair es Senaa, a port for the construction of barcasses. A channel brought in the waters of the river, a door pierced in the southern rampart allowed for the outflow of water when the interior basin needed to be dry. Immigration to the area by Iberian Muslims began in the 12th century and lasted throughout the centuries with Salé and Rabat being the main port cities that were not colonized by Europeans by the start of the 17th century; even Moroccan-controlled Safi had a large Spanish population, which made Salé all the more attractive to the Muslims from Iberia.

Shipbuilding had taken root by the 13th century. From the mid-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries Salé was Morocco's most important trading center for Mediterranean merchants and those from Flanders and England. The patron saint of the city during these years was *Sīdī ᶜIddir* who gave way to *Sīdī ᶜAbd Allah bin Hassūn* (d. 1604) by the 17th century. *Sīdī ᶜAbd Allah* advice was sought by men and women as he had the *common decency and modesty*, and ability to appear before women as a woman. *Sīdī ben ᶜAshir* was a local saint credited with calming the ocean long enough to allow the rovers to safely pass over the protective sandbar lying just outside the harbor. Salé was not just a renowned military center; it was a refuge for aesthetes and scholars, a center of classical, orthodox, religious education and was considered to be one of the holiest cities in Morocco.



By the early 17th century, Salé had an autonomous government, and paid little tribute to the Moroccan ruler. At its height, the Corsair republic of Salé had a status much comparable to the Republic of Tunis or Algiers. Formally established in 1608, it was the first of the three republics that would combine to form the Republic of Bou-Regreb. It had existed as a semi-autonomous city-state since the 1590s and became the dominant partner of the Republic of Bou-Regreb which formed when it combined with a second Republic of the Andalusians in Rabat and the third one of the Hornacheros in the Kasbah in the 1620s. These Republics had withdrawn their allegiance to the Sultan to varying degrees as shown on Fridays when the *khuṭba* no longer included his name.

Rabat was *where the Arabs of Chaouia life* according to DUARTE PACHECO PEREIRA, an early 15th century Portuguese sailor and author of the 1509 work *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis. Chaouia* is south of Rabat surrounding Casablanca and covers much of the former Barghawata tribal lands; the Arab tribes that settled there in the 12th century were of *Hilālī* and *Sulaym* descent. The *Hilālī* are from the Nadj region in Arabia, later settling in Tunisia. They were defeated by the Almohads and the ZUGHBA family was forced into exile along the Atlantic coast just inland from Casablanca, in the *Oulad Ziane*. The *Salaym* originated in Hejaz and Nejd in Arabia and followed the *Hilal* into North Africa, first settling in Tripoli before moving into the Chaouia area, just west of Khouribga, where they assumed the name *Achach*. By 1500 Rabat had very few shops and only a few inhabited neighborhoods according to the description in the 1526 work *Cosmographia Del Africa* by LEO AFRICANUS.

Rabat was repopulated by the mudejar and morisco population expelled from Iberia as they were not welcome in Salé. The Hornacho exiles would form the Hornachero community, known for its brigandage, in the ruins of the Kasbah. The animosity between Salé and Rabat has been described as being like, at the worst, that of *hostile brothers*. The irony of this analogy was perhaps lost on the author as it was usual for a new sultan to execute or imprison all of his brothers when he took the throne. The Slawis referred to the exiles as *an-Nasara 'l-Qashtiiyin (the Christians of Castile)* or used the expression *l-Mslmin d-r-Rbat (the Muslims of Rabat)* in contradistinction to *real* Muslims.

At the end of the 16th century Salé was being described in contrast to Rabat, as where the wealthiest merchants lived.

Bibliography

Maurice comte de Périgny. *Au Maroc; Casablanca, Rabat, Meknès*. (Pierre Roger, Paris; 1919). URL: https://archive.org/details/aumaroccasablanc00pruoft/page/102/mode/2up

Kenneth L. Brown, "An Urban View of Moroccan History Salé, 1000 – 1800," *Hespéris Tamuda* (1971) 12: 5 – 106.

Mohamed Fatha, "Aspects of the History and Urbanization of Salé from foundation until the beginning of the 20th century," (The Future of Salé Association; 2012) Ville de Salé. URL: https://en.villedesale.ma/

[1] Kenneth Brown, "An Urban View of Moroccan History Salé, 1000 – 1800," Hespéris Tamuda (1971) 12: 5 – 106. Much of the information in this article is from this source.

[2] Maurice comte de Périgny. *Au Maroc; Casablanca, Rabat, Meknès*. (Pierre Roger, Paris; 1919) p. 98, *et seq*. URL: https://archive.org/details/aumaroccasablanc00pruoft/page/102/mode/2up

[3] Leo Africanus, *Cosmographia Del Africa* (1526); http://leoafricanus.com/expeditions/exp edition2_2-2001/Sale_Cristel.html and http://leoafricanus.com/expeditions/expedition2_2-2001/Sale_Pirates.html

[4] Rabat. La rampe de Sidi Makhlouf, URL: http://rol-benzaken.centerblog.net/15588-rabat-la-rampe-de-sidi-makhlouf

[5] *op.cit*. Périgny. *Au Maroc* (1919) p. 88.